



The Latvian Jewish Courier

THE FOURTH OF JULY IN RIGA: MARKING THE BEGINNING OF THE HOLOCAUST IN LATVIA

On July 4, 1941, the Great Choral Synagogue on Gogol Street in Riga, built in 1871, was burned by local Nazi henchmen—the Latvian Auxiliary police. This date was later designated the Day of Remembrance of the genocide of the Jews in Latvia.



At the rally on July 4, 2022, President of Latvia Egils Levits speaks at the ruins of Gogol Shul

On July 4, 2022, a commemorative ceremony was held at the memorial in Riga on Gogol Street with the highest state officials participating. The ceremony, organized by the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia, was attended by President Egils Levits of Latvia, Speaker of the Saeima Inara Murniece, Minister of Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkevics, Minister of Defense Artis Pabriks, Minister of Welfare Gatis Eglitis, Deputy Chairman of the Riga City Council Edvards Smiltens, deputies of the Saeima and the Riga City Council, foreign diplomats, a delegation from the German Riga Committee, as well as members of the Jewish community and public representatives. The ceremony was led by Professor Ruvin Ferber, a member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences.

On the morning of July 4, after a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic, the traditional "March of the Living" was held in Riga. Dedicated to the memory of Jews who died in the Holocaust, it was organized by the Museum of the Ghetto and the Holocaust in Latvia. More than a hundred people came to honor the memory of the dead, including descendants of the survivors, foreign state ambassadors, and Latvian officials, as well

as residents and visitors to Latvia. The route of the march always starts from the memorial sign at the corner of Lomonosov and Ebreju streets, at the site of the old Jewish cemetery. It passes through the area where the ghetto was located during the war years, and ends at the memorial at the site of the burnt Gogol Shul Choral Synagogue, concluding around noon so that marchers can take part in the rally there.

In his speech, the President of Latvia said that the German occupation regime and its collaborators had committed crimes against humanity in Latvia. July 4 marked only the beginning of that tragedy, followed by massacres in the forests of Rumbula, Bikernieki, and other places in Latvia. However, the events of this particular day were symbolic: the first victims perished in the burnt synagogue—the temple of God—which for thousands of years had united the Jewish people in faith and hope for a brighter future. To this day, the ruins of this burnt synagogue serve as a symbol of the genocide of innocent people caused by racism and intolerance.



Participants of the March of the Living pass through the streets of the former ghetto

This massacre destroyed the Jewish community of Latvia, which was an integral part of the Latvian nation and society. The Latvian president stressed the importance of not allowing the distortion and misuse of the history of World War II and the Holocaust to justify international crime in our time. He expressed that Holocaust education, commemoration, and research are important tasks and are moral and political imperatives for future generations.

We dare not forget those selfless Latvians who saved their Jewish fellow citizens. Their names are immortalized next to the name of Zanis Lipke on the monument near the synagogue ruins. The work of historian Margers Vestermanis has revealed to us the identities of approximately 700 rescuers of Jews in Latvia.

In her speech, the speaker of the Saeima said that Jewish

Continued on next page

Our Memorial/Yizkor will take place on Sunday, November 20, 2022, at 12:00 Noon in Park East Synagogue, 163 East 67th Street, New York.

**Guest Speaker:
Ilya Lensky, director of the Jews in Latvia Museum**

**Guest Cantor:
Joseph Malovany,
Fifth Avenue Synagogue**

THE FOURTH OF JULY IN RIGA (continued)

victims of the Holocaust demonstrate that intolerance can lead to annihilation, that there is no justification for these heinous crimes in Latvian history, and that they have no statute of limitations. She confirmed that Jews were, are, and will be an important part of our country's society.

The memorial ceremony also featured speeches by Artis Pabriks, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense; Israeli Ambassador to Latvia Sharon Rappaport-Palgi; German Ambassador to Latvia Christian Heldt; Chairman of the Dresden Jewish Community Michael Hurschell; and Deputy Chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia Dmitry Krupnikov.

The memorial prayer was led by Rabbi Elijohu Krumer of the Riga Peitav Shul synagogue and Yevgeny Ambreit, a member of the religious community.

* * *

Commemorative events also took place in other Latvian cities:



At the memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in Daugavpils

Daugavpils—The day of remembrance of the genocide of the Jewish people was observed at the memorial in Pogulyanka (Mezhciems), where attendees laid flowers and lit commemorative candles.

At first, the Jews in Daugavpils were driven into the Daugavpils ghetto. Later, thousands of Jews from nearby towns and villages—Kraslava, Griva, Ilukste, Dagda, and others—were also brought there. A total of 15,000 to 20,000 Jews were brought to the Daugavpils ghetto—fewer than 100 survived. On the granite monument installed at the memorial, the Star of David is carved with an inscription in Yiddish: "In memory of the children of Israel." In his speech at the ceremony, the chairman of the Daugavpils City Council Andrejs Elksnins stressed that it is the duty of every person to preserve the memory of the victims and to prevent a repetition of the horrors of the Holocaust. Flowers were laid at the memorial by representatives of national cultural centers and communities of Daugavpils, the Consulate General of Belarus, and residents of the city.

Liepaja—As in preceding years, July 4, the day of mourning, saw representatives of the Liepaja Jewish community, along with Liepaja Mayor Gunars Ansins, visiting the memorial monument for the victims of the shootings in Shkede. The rally began in the Alley of the Righteous, with a speech by Ilana Ivanova, head of the public foundation "Jewish Heritage of Liepaja." She emphasized that only thanks to these people—the righteous—did the survivors live to tell the world about this tragedy. "I cannot fully comprehend those inhuman events in Liepaja," Mayor Ansins said, "I am grateful to everyone who spoke about it."



Ilana Ivanova speaks to rally participants in Shkede

After a traditional memorial prayer, flowers were laid at the memorial. Attendees then went to the stone monument on the site of the Liepaja ghetto. On July 1, 1942, the Nazis sent 826 Jews there who had survived the destruction of the main part of the Jewish community of Liepaja—7,379 people before the war. By the time the Courland Pocket was liquidated in May 1945, only 25 Jews remained in Liepaja.

Cesis—On July 4, 2022, near many houses in the city center, concrete replicas of different pairs of shoes could be seen. Here, on that day, an art exhibit titled "One Nine Four One," created by artists Krista and Reinis Dzudzilo, was opened in Rožu Square. The pieces in this exhibition are displayed near the houses where the Cesis Jews who were killed in the summer of 1941 once lived. "The purpose of these objects," the artists say, "is to bring the Jews back to the present, to the history and everyday life of Cesis, allowing their memory to return to their homes."



Concrete replicas of different pairs of shoes at one of the buildings in Cesis, where Jewish families lived before the war

Until 1941, a Jewish community of about 200 lived in Cesis and the surrounding area. By the beginning of the Holocaust, a few families had managed to escape, but many remained in their homes. In early August, all of them were arrested and shot in the forest near Lake Ninieris. Those who fled never returned to their hometown.

By Bronya Shif, based on materials from the Latvian press

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RESPONSES TO GEORGE SCHWAB'S MEMOIR

Editor's Note: Over a year ago, the memoir *Odyssey of a Child Survivor*, was published by Professor George Schwab, the oldest member of the JSL organization. Since then many responses from attentive readers have been received. They thank the author and also note the most impressive chapters and sections of the book. Below, the Courier introduces readers to the most notable reviews.

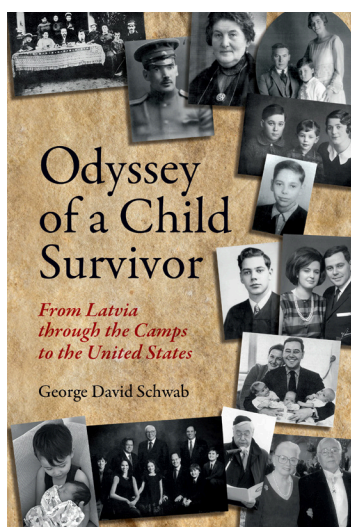
The first is the review in Washington, D.C.'s United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's publication, "Studies of the Holocaust and Genocide." In this review, among other things, the author writes:

The amazing journey of George David Schwab (b. 1931) from "rich kid" in Riga to Holocaust survivor to professor of political science at CCNY and co-founder (with the late Hans J. Morgenthau) of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy is well worth the read...

...In her introduction, Religious Sister of Mercy Carol Rittner, Distinguished Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies Emerita at Richard Stockton University, observes that accounts such as Schwab's require us to think about today: are we bystanders to the suffering of others that we learn about every day through the media and via the Internet?

...In including these [eighty photographs], the author has made his text not only a tribute, legacy, and keepsake for his own family, but also a graphic and visual testament to the career of a scholar and leader"...the book makes a fine read for people involved in Holocaust studies and for others who want a window into the Holocaust.

— **Steven Leonard Jacobs, University of Alabama**



Below are excerpts from the responses of other readers:

Odyssey of a Child Survivor is a great gift George Schwab gives to his children and grandchildren, to his many relatives and friends, and to the memory of his loved ones and the numerous others who perished under Nazism. It is a great gift to anyone who reads it.

— **Lydia Nenoff**

George Schwab's boyhood love of adult gossip inspired a well-developed gift for storytelling. His parallel childhood desire to be where things are happening led to a life filled with fascinating people, many famed in their fields, and others just plain famous.

— **Mitchell A. Lieber**

I could not put this book down! What a fascinating personal account of George Schwab's life from the depth of despair through the triumph over evil! This journey, no matter how long and difficult, ends in a celebration of life. His love of life transcends all the horrors he survived in the camps and he rose above it all in a remarkable manner.

— **Sophie Nadell**

To have experienced the concentration camps and to come out of that past in the positive way that he has speak to the strength of his character and his fighting spirit: bravo bravo bravo!

— **Myra Sutin**

Ever both an observer and a participant in this world, Schwab was instrumental in, among other political affairs,

brokering the peace in Northern Ireland. His relating of this coup is riveting, as are some of his tales of family life with triplet boys and academic intrigue.

Continually holding my interest, this volume is a true contribution to the history of the Holocaust, to the strength of human bonds, and also to the perfidy of human beings, to foreign affairs in the second half of the 20th century, and to living a complete and satisfying life after experiences that broke many.

— **Carole**

George Schwab emerges as a man of enormous vigor, talent, and accomplishment—all of which appears in a writing style that is always elegant and consistently engaging. I should add—in the spirit of full disclosure—that, for over forty years, George has been our upstairs neighbor and that we have never met a more gentle, gracious, and generous man. He has lived an inspiring life that makes for a beautifully told story.

— **Morris B. Holbrook**

Mr. Schwab foiled Hitler's plans for him and went on to live a long and fruitful life. He managed to put the unspeakable cruelty of his earlier life behind him and to live life with great fun and as a celebration of life. I found this book very inspirational, a joy to read, and very well-written.

— **Anonymous**

In his adult life, Schwab would work to bring world leaders together using an innate talent for diplomacy and tact. But the point of memoir is candor and, in this account, he glosses over nothing related to the war years. When I read about his father's death and his own loneliness

in the camps, a child separated from his family, I could not help but cry.

— **Amazon Customer**

I have been a guest in the home of George Schwab and his late wife Eleanora many times. When I read this book it brought back many happy memories of wonderful human beings who exemplify the best in humanity. This memoir is gripping, informative, and a reminder that evil will never win.

— **Sister Deirdre Mullan**

It is an accessible book that will enable people of all backgrounds and historical interest levels to learn firsthand about the Holocaust and the resiliency of its survivors. He led, and continues to lead, a very eventful life. It is an honor to share in its details.

— **Tina N.**

Dear George,

I read slowly your book, chapter by chapter, in English. You were saved and blessed by G-d to perform His Providence Mission which you entirely fulfilled to tell your miracle Holocaust story—from being persecuted by the Nazis as an "Untermensch" boy to become a world-recognized professor, scholar, and statesman of the USA.

I am deeply impressed with your amazing life story, I am proud and highly value our friendship and being your colleague. With deep respect and admiration,

— **Yours, David Silberman**

IN RUMBULA – NOVEMBER 30, 1970 HOW WE COMMEMORATED THE HOLOCAUST IN SOVIET TIMES

This memorial meeting dedicated to the victims of Nazism erupted into a public demonstration protesting the Soviet Union's discrimination against Jews.

Secret, careful, and lengthy preparations for this undertaking were made at the apartment of Gesia and Semyon Kamaisky. However, on November 29, 1970, on the eve of our memorial event, we discovered that the authorities had gained knowledge of our planned Jewish gathering and set up their own official meeting on the same date, November 30, 1970. After discussing the development within our activist group we decided to change nothing and to accept this as a challenge.



Zhanis Lipke with a group of Jewish activists at a rally in Rumbula dedicated to the memory of the Jews shot there
From left to right: David Silberman, Zhanis Lipke, Boris Shperling, Josef Schneider

In the wake of the attempted hijacking of a Leningrad plane to Israel on June 15, 1970, the situation with authorities had become very sensitive. There were many KGB searches and interrogations of Zionist activists in Riga and other large USSR cities. Our group decided that it was important to demonstrate to the Soviet authorities that arrests and searches did not frighten the Jewish public and did not deter Jewish nationalist activity. To assist in the defense of the people arrested on June 15, we said that they had nothing to do with Jewish nationalist actions.

Before the November 30 meeting started, the authorities gathered a large contingent of troops, cadets from Riga military institutions, militia, and KGB agents in Rumbula Forest. Delegations from many different Riga enterprises were there. A military music band was present. It was readily apparent that the authorities placed special importance on the event.

When Jewish activists began arriving with flowers and wreaths at the appointed time, we heard the security guards' excited voices say, "Here they come." To start the official meeting, the brass band performed mournful melodies. Then the Communist Party representative gave his speech to officially open the meeting. The second speaker, the military representative, gave a historical review of WWII and described Nazi crimes against the population in the occupied Nazi territories, making passing mention of the Jews among those who suffered. The next speaker reported on the current international situation and attacked Zionism and the "aggressive policy" of the State of Israel. At this moment, Rivka Alexandrovich, Michael Neiburger, Moshe Margulis, and other Jewish activists protested by leaving the meeting area as militia

and KGB men attentively observed their exit.

Artistic performances followed the speeches. Official participants included Dina Roitkop, a former actress of the Solomon Mikhoels theater. She read the poem, "Teefe Griber" (The Deep Pits) in Yiddish. The official meeting ended with the brass band playing somber music.

However, the Jews did not disperse. The Jews moved from the meadow square, the place of official meetings, and assembled near the Rumbula memorial marker, on which the words are engraved in Russian, Latvian, and also in Yiddish, "To the memory of the victims of fascism." The security guards, militia, and KGB agents also did not leave. They stood around, observed, and some took photographs. The Jews assembled in a tight-knit circle and awaited speeches by the Jewish activists. The tension grew.

At the last moment, the synagogue's official representative refused to recite the Mourner's Kaddish, which started all meetings of Riga Jews at Rumbula. After some commotion and discussion, Eliahu Valk stepped onto the hill and chanted the Kaddish prayer, opening our annual Jewish memorial meeting. The militiamen walked through the crowd and toward the speaker. However, they didn't interrupt Valk and allowed him to finish the prayer. A second person, Valeriy Portnoy, arose to speak. A militia officer interrupted and demanded an explanation of who permitted this meeting, who organized it, and on what grounds it was allowed.



A rally in Rumbula near the monument to the executed Jews

At this moment, Yosif Roitman, attending in his Navy officer uniform, blocked the militia officer from reaching the speaker. "Who are you?" demanded Roitman in a commanding voice. The militia officer showed Roitman his I.D. document. Jews nearby wrote down his I.D. information.

"We assembled here under the USSR Constitution's rules!" continued a perturbed Roitman. "It guarantees citizens freedom of assembly. Show us a document indicating that such meetings are prohibited, and we will take your questions into consideration. But as for now, we will continue." Yosif pushed the militia officer aside and stood in front of the speaker defending him. The militiaman was shocked by the Jews' daring act, resoluteness, and lack of fear of the militia and KGB. Apparently, he had never encountered this phenomenon in his

IN RUMBULA – NOVEMBER 30, 1970 (continued)

tenure in the secret Soviet services.

Indignant voices from the rear rows were shouting out loud, "Drive him away from here." "Here were murdered our dearest." "This soil is soaked with the blood of our relatives. This is the reason we came here! And he is mocking us!" One woman sobbed. The crowd was offended and defiant. The meeting began to look like open resistance to authorities. The speeches continued and none of the militia and KGB tried to disrupt them. However, they remained until the end and some took photos.

With all of its speakers, the Jewish meeting continued for more than two hours. At the conclusion, the young people's assembly performed songs of the ghetto resistance and read nationalistic Jewish poems. Avi Chait recited his own poem. David Chait performed songs from the Yiddish repertoire. Nachum Kleinstein moved the crowd with the reading of his Yiddish poems about the Jewish victims massacred by the Nazis in this very place, Rumbula Forest.

Word of this event at Rumbula spread to the Jewish public in Riga and other Soviet cities that same day. Several times in the following days, Kol Yisrael's Russian radio in Israel broadcast the content of the Rumbula speeches. The November 30, 1970



Actress Dina Roitkop reads Samuil Galkin's poem "Teefe Griber" (The Deep Pits) in Yiddish at a rally in Rumbula

meeting deeply inspired participants and many in Jewish circles as a protest against Soviet distortion of Holocaust history and its propaganda's concealment of the heroic Jewish contribution to defeating Nazism.

**By David Silberman,
edited by Mitchell Lieber**

ONCE AGAIN ABOUT THE CUKURS CASE

Editor's note: On May 26, 2022, as previously reported, Linda Kinstler's book, *Come to This Court and Cry*, went on sale in London. This book is the carefully documented story about two members of the so-called Arajs team, one of whom is the infamous Herberts Cukurs, a ruthless murderer of Jews in Latvia, whose case for recognition as such is still pending in the Latvian prosecutor's office. The second individual is the grandfather of the book's author. On June 15, the presentation of the book took place in the famous London Wiener Holocaust Library. Anticipating the event, London newspaper *The Guardian* published a long article by Kinstler, "Nazi or KGB Agent? My Search For My Grandfather's Hidden Past," which was the book's focus. Below is a summary of this article. Translating the book into Latvian and Russian is currently under consideration.

My grandparents had been high-school sweethearts in Latvia during the country's first period of independence, which lasted from 1920 to 1940. They lost track of each other after school. A few years later, war broke out in Europe. In 1940, the Soviet Union occupied Latvia. The following year, the country was taken by the Nazis. In 1944, most of its territory was returned to Soviet rule. Each sequential occupation unleashed waves of devastation. When my grandparents met again on the street in 1947 or 1948, I imagine that each was glad to see that the other was alive. Boris told my grandmother he was working as an insurance salesman. She did not ask too many questions about what he did during the war. So much was unspeakable.

The war had created a chaotic field of shifting allegiances. The way Latvia was claimed by one power then the other meant that, by the end, there were people who had fought on both sides. In some Latvian families, older brothers were conscripted into divisions of the Germany army, while younger brothers were drafted by Soviet forces. Other men joined armed partisan units in the forest to fight a guerrilla war. In 1944, when the Soviets invaded for the second time, the atmosphere in Riga was thick with paranoia.



*Members of the Arajs team during training in Germany
In the first row, second from the left—Viktor Arajs
In the upper row in the center—Boris Kinstler*

Boris married my grandmother in March 1949. The following month, when she was already pregnant with my father, he vanished. He told her he was going on a business

ONCE AGAIN ABOUT THE CUKURS CASE (continued)

trip to the Estonian city of Sillamäe. When he left, he took with him nearly every photograph of himself and every document of his life. According to his death notice, which was sent to my grandmother, he killed himself in Sillamäe on 25 April. After Boris disappeared, something strange happened: a pension cheque arrived from the Soviet security agency (which would eventually be renamed the KGB). That was how my grandmother found out what her husband had really been doing for work after the war, and perhaps during it, too.

On 1 May 1949, my grandmother went to participate in the International Workers' Day parade, as was required for all students of her medical school. She was five months pregnant. Out of the procession, two women emerged and walked towards her. They gave her a watch and a letter, artefacts that were supposed to serve as proof of Boris's death. But my grandmother did not believe the story they told her, and continued to entertain hope that her husband may still be alive somewhere. Sometime after that encounter, she was summoned to KGB headquarters in Riga. The officers confiscated the letter and the watch. They told her not to go looking for the body.

We don't know what was in the letter. My grandmother died in 2002, before I knew anything of this story, before I knew just how many questions there were to ask about my grandfather.

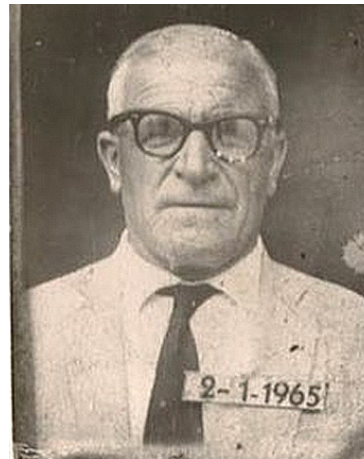
I started reading about the Arājs Kommando, trying to figure out who had belonged to it and what had become of them. Soon I found myself reading a series of curious old headlines in the Latvian press. A 2011 article in one of the newspapers reported that the Latvian prosecutor general's office was investigating whether a man named Herberts Cukurs had been involved "in the killing of Jews". Cukurs is remembered, by some, as the "Butcher" or the "Hangman" of Riga. He, too, belonged to the Arājs Kommando, though the official role he occupied is disputed.

The circumstances of the case were confounding: when the Latvian prosecutor began the investigation, in 2005, Cukurs had been dead for 40 years. He bears the ignominious honour of being the only Nazi whom the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad, is known for certain to have assassinated.

In 2016, I wrote to the Latvian prosecutor general's office asking for more information about the case. I read the newspaper reports and tried to piece together the story: how could a dead man be the subject of a criminal investigation? Why had the press secretary, in one article, said that it was impossible to "confirm or deny" Cukurs's participation in the Holocaust?

My curiosity about the legal particulars acted as a cover. I couldn't help but wonder whether my grandfather's name might turn up somewhere among the files.

At its peak, there were about 1,200 men in the Arājs Kommando, though in 1941 there were probably only about 300 members, the majority of them between 16 and 21 years old. The number of educated recruits decreased over



Cukurs in 1965, shortly before his death

time, as the actual nature of the work became clear. My grandfather Boris, though, evidently stayed on.

He and Cukurs must have known each other. The Kommando clubhouse had a fireplace, a yard and a garage. My grandfather's mastery of German earned him the role of "liaison officer" with the German command – he was the one who would send messages back and forth from the Latvians to the Germans requesting guns,

supplies, instructions.

There are several accounts of Cukurs participating with zeal in the killings. In late 1941, in the forest of Rumbula outside Riga, where 25,000 Jews were killed over the course of a few weeks, Cukurs is said to have praised the Germans' marksmanship, to have joined them in firing rounds. Survivors remember him being present in the Riga ghetto prior to the killings, testifying that he participated in rounding up its Jewish inhabitants before they were escorted to their deaths.

We will probably never know when, exactly, my grandfather was recruited by Soviet agents. In her study of Soviet interrogation records of former Kommando members, the historian Rudīte Viksne came across mentions that Boris might have been working for both sides all along, but found the evidence to be unconvincing. "It is unlikely, despite the rumors, that agents of the Soviet security organs infiltrated the Arājs Kommando from the very beginning," she wrote. "However, it has occasionally been said that Boris Kinstler, who was Arājs's translator and associate, was a spy in 1941." At least 12 members of the Kommando were indeed recruited by Soviet authorities during and after the war.

Cukurs, by contrast, made his whereabouts well known. He simply did not think he had to hide. He had been a national hero before the war, a pioneering aviator known for his improbable transcontinental journeys.

After the war, he and his family fled the Soviet occupation, first to Rio de Janeiro and then to Sao Paulo. He told a journalist that he chose Brazil as a place to settle because it had more than 300 aerodromes. He created a small tourism business, selling paddle-boat trips and seaplane rides at the Rodrigo de Freitas lagoon. He couldn't stop himself from courting the press, from selling his new venture. Soon, Jewish survivors began surveilling him, snapping photographs of him at work on the water to send back to investigators in London.

The only official account of his death can be found in a memoir written by the lead assassin, with the help of the former Mossad agent and journalist Gad Shimron. The author

ONCE AGAIN ABOUT THE CUKURS CASE (continued)

is identified only by his operational pseudonym, Anton Kuenzle, not by his real name, Yaakov Meidad. He narrates how he lured Cukurs to a vacant property in a seaside neighborhood of the Uruguayan capital, Montevideo. Three Mossad agents waited for him inside. “The original plan had been to overpower Cukurs, but not to kill him instantly,” explained Meidad. “We had planned on a very brief court martial, in which we intended to read the charges to him, in the name of the 30,000 Jews from Riga and Latvia – children, women, the elderly and men—who had been murdered by him over 20 years ago.” But they never had the chance: Cukurs reached for his gun, prompting his attackers to reach for theirs. “One of us put a gun to Cukurs’ head and pulled the trigger twice. The silencer and the noise of our struggle completely swallowed the sound of the shots. It was Tuesday, 23 February 1965, 12.30 pm.”

On his body, they left a copy of the closing speech of Sir Hartley Shawcross, the chief British prosecutor at the international military tribunal at Nuremberg, who had reminded the judges of the nature of the crimes committed upon the territories of Eastern Europe. He encouraged them to imagine that it was not just lawyers, journalists and military police staring back at them in the Nuremberg courtroom, but all of humanity, bedraggled and wounded from the long years of war. The judges, he argued, had to imagine that “mankind itself” stood before them, crying out a single, simple plea: after this ordeal to which mankind has been submitted, mankind itself—struggling now to reestablish in all the countries of the world the common simple things—liberty, love, understanding—comes to this court and cries: “These are our laws—let them prevail!”

To probe the past is to submit one’s ancestors to a certain kind of trial. In this case, the trial, or at least the spectre of one, came to me. For almost 20 years, the Latvian prosecutor general’s office has been quietly investigating whether it is true that Cukurs personally participated in the genocide of Latvian Jews, if he pulled the trigger himself or merely watched while others did so. This criminal investigation—really, a pre-trial proceeding—is the one I read about in the Latvian papers, that seemed such an anachronism. When I asked the prosecutor’s office for more information about what, exactly, it had been charged with investigating, and what could possibly come of it, they quickly supplied me with

a detailed response.

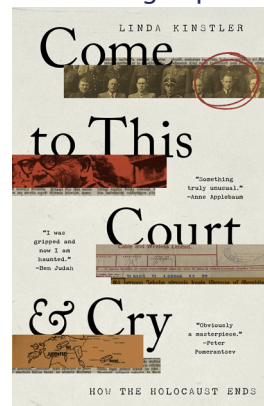
The office had been searching the world for evidence, and had petitioned all the relevant nations—Russia, Israel, Brazil, Uruguay, Germany, the UK—for supporting documents. There would be a decision, and theoretically, as a letter from the press secretary explained, a trial. A ghost in the dock. The prosecutor in charge of the case wrote that he recognized my surname, noting that someone with the same name was “more or less significant in the Herberts Cukurs case.” He wondered if it was not just a mere coincidence. I wrote back, confirming that my interest was not purely journalistic, for I was also trying to fill in some of the blanks of my family story.

I found myself retracing the prosecutor’s steps, following the origins and evolution of this unexpected case. I discovered my grandfather’s name in postwar interrogation records carried out by Soviet intelligence officers, such as the 1946 account of a former Kommando officer named Jānis Brencis, who was asked to list all the group’s members. Cukurs is the 30th name he remembers, Boris is the 165th.

Other interrogation records reveal glimpses of Boris in action, partial and perhaps fictive recollections of a deeply troubled time. One officer remembers him standing at the border of a killing trench, in conversation with a fellow soldier about the indignity and injustice of the murders. Another describes him riding in the car with Arājs, speaking “good German”, working as an interpreter.

It is difficult to figure out how truthful these accounts are. This is the trouble that haunts all testimony, but especially testimony delivered at the behest of a hostile power – in this case, the Soviets—when the witness is trying to save his own skin. These glimpses of my grandfather are all that remain, and their context is enough to confirm his complicity. Of that there is no question. It is what I expected: I was not looking for a redemptive story.

The U.S. edition of Linda Kinstler’s book will be printed and available to buyers on Amazon and in bookstores on August 23, 2022.



Based on the article by Linda Kinstler from The Guardian, shortened and prepared by Semyon Gizunterman

Dear JSL members and friends,

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MAX KAUFMANN: GHETTO PRISONER, MEMOIR WRITER

In the fall of 2010, we began to compile articles about outstanding Jews from Latvia to be included in the Latvian Jewish Encyclopedia, planned for publishing by the Shamir Society in Riga. The following is an article prepared for the aforementioned volume.



Kaufmann, Max (04/06/1897 — 06/22/1987) was a ghetto prisoner and memoir writer. He was the seventh child born into a prosperous Jewish family in Daugavpils.

After graduating from high school, he was a successful businessman in his hometown and wholesale textile trader in Riga until the occupation of Latvia by Soviet troops and

later by the Nazis. On July 4, 1941, he was one of the few surviving witnesses to the burning of the Zeilen-Shul synagogue on Stabu Street, with the rabbi and members of the congregation trapped inside. Together with his wife and their 15-year-old son, he became a prisoner of the Riga ghetto. His wife perished during the first round of killings in Rumbula. In May of 1943, while he was working at the peat bogs of Sloka, his son, Arthur, was shot practically in front of his eyes by the guard, Roshman (who later became the commandant of the Riga ghetto). After the murder of his son, Kaufmann did not speak for several weeks. However, one day after the group was returned to Riga, he raised his arms to the sky and vowed to avenge his son. He was later transferred to the Kaiserwald concentration camp and, in August of 1944, along with the few survivors, was transported to Buchenwald, where he participated in the infamous death march to Sachsenhausen.

After the liberation on May 1, 1945, Kaufmann assumed secretarial duties at the Schlachtensee displaced persons camp in Berlin. He was then appointed head of the labor department of the Central Committee of the Liberated Jews of Germany in Munich. Within the framework of this committee, he created the first association of Latvian Jewish survivors, as well as a search group for war criminals responsible for the extermination of the Jews of Latvia. He devoted all his free time outside of working on the committee to meeting with hundreds of Latvian Jewish survivors and gathering their written testimonies describing their experiences in the ghettos and concentration camps. In 1947 in Munich, the result was the publication of the book, *The Extermination*



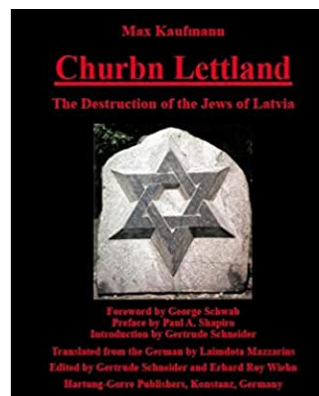
Arthur Kaufmann was shot and killed by ghetto commandant Roshman

of the Jews of Latvia, in German (*Die Vernichtung der Juden Lettlands*). This work, describing many details of life in the ghettos and concentration camps, was the first book about the tragedies of Latvian Jews during the Holocaust. Despite its inaccessibility in Latvia, through the book, many Holocaust survivors and those who returned from evacuation, were able to find information about their relatives. It should be noted that Kaufmann wrote his book immediately after his liberation, without the ability to compare the memories of witnesses with archival documents (which later became available to many other researchers). He therefore could not avoid some inaccuracies in the description of specific situations. The book also places great emphasis on the participation of the local population in the extermination of Jews.



The first edition of Kaufmann's book about the Riga ghetto, published in Munich, 1947

In 1947, Kaufmann immigrated to New York where he opened a tailoring and dry cleaning business. He continued the search that he started in Germany for former Nazis to bring them to justice. His work led to many of them being found not only in Germany, but in other countries as well, particularly, in South America where many had fled. At the same time, as early as the late 1940s, he held regular meetings with Latvian Jews and organized a group of former prisoners of the Riga ghetto. This became the basis for the creation of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia organization, which was officially registered in New York in 1984. He also conducted extensive correspondence with former ghetto prisoners in Latvia and other countries, as well as with prominent political and public figures: H. Truman, A. Einstein, E. Roosevelt, G. Meir, A. Eban, M. Dayan, T. Kolek, and many others.



The first English edition of Kaufmann's book, published by JSL in 2010

In 1968 in New York, he published *The Last Road of Professor Simon Dubnow*, while actively participating in the preparation of the monograph, *Jews of Latvia*, published in English in Israel in 1971. The main book written by Kaufmann, *The Extermination of the Jews of Latvia*, was republished in German in 1999 in Germany and, in 2010, was translated and published in English. Later in Riga, in 2012, it was translated and published with extensive endnotes in Russian and Latvian, and, in 2019, the same was done in English.

By Ivar Brod
Translated by Aviva Solovey

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE

On April 18, the great violinist of our day, Gidon Kremer and his brainchild, the Kremerata Baltica Chamber Orchestra, celebrated their centenary together with a unique concert at the Latvian National Opera. Chulpan Khamatova, who recently became a full-time actress at the New Riga Theatre, also took part in the concert.



Gidon Kremer performs at the centenary concert at the Latvian National Opera

"Everything is very simple. I turned 75 in February. And the orchestra, which includes musicians from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, turned 25 in the same month. Here is your centenary," explained Kremer. Kremerata Baltica's story begins in February 1997, when Kremer celebrated turning half a century old. He decided to celebrate the anniversary at home in Riga. In the Great Guild, together with the famous Lithuanian conductor Saulius Sondeckis (who has since passed away), Kremer presented his new project—concerts by the youth orchestra Kremerata Baltica.

And now such a wonderful anniversary. The first half of the program featured three works by composers from the Baltic countries: "Fratres" by Estonian Arvo Pärt, "De Profundis" by the 47-year-old Lithuanian Raminta Sherkshnite, and "Midnight in Riga" by the Latvian Artur Maskats. The performance of the last work was dedicated to the Riga saviors of the Jews—Zhanis and Johanna Lipke. The violin solo was performed by Kremer himself.



The Kremerata Baltica ensemble on the day of the jubilee

The second half began with the tragic work of Igor Loboda, "Requiem for Ukraine," after which Chulpan Khamatova came on stage, doing it so skillfully that the audience did not applaud. In complete silence, the actress read in Russian, Ukrainian, and Latvian the poems of the Russian poet Vera Polozkova about the war "These Are My Blue Mountains," Kremer then came out with his violin and continued the concert, while Khamatova sat down on the stage floor to listen.

At the conclusion of the anniversary concert were

encores—Kremer played Astor Piazzola, with the orchestra ending the night with a magical interpretation of "Happy Birthday to You."

On April 27, 2022, Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica, met with the delegation of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), which arrived in Latvia to mark the fifth anniversary of the creation of AJC Central Europe Office.

Heading the delegation was AJC President Harriet P. Schliefer and Acting Director of the ACJ Central Europe Office Sebastian Rejak.

During the meeting, the parties exchanged views on Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica informed the delegation about Latvia's position and measures taken against the aggressor state as well as support provided to Ukraine.



The AJC delegation in Riga

"There can be no sanctions relief until the war is stopped, Russian forces withdrawn, Ukraine's territorial integrity restored, and the issue of reparations addressed," said Lukaševica.

The AJC delegation welcomed Latvia's efforts in promoting Holocaust remembrance and in combating antisemitism. Schliefer expressed thanks for the law adopted by Latvia on the compensation to the Latvian Jewish community for heirless property once owned by those who perished in the Holocaust and that was lost because of actions of the occupation regimes.

The September 2018 issue of the *Courier* reported that a secret room had been discovered in the attic of an old house in the Latgale suburb; the room housed various household items, books, old letters and documents—undoubtedly belonging to a Jewish family. The space apparently had remained locked and unknown from the moment its owners moved to the ghetto in the summer and autumn of 1941. The discovered room was to be repaired, with the contents of this cache handed over to the Jews in Latvia Museum, where employees began to study the history of the family's belongings. Some old, seemingly unnecessary household items, but also other documents, photographs, personal correspondence, and books, likely presented to the father of the family or purchased by him, were uncovered. All of this comprises a sizable collection of about 700 items that show the life of a middle-class Jewish family in Riga at that time in its entirety. There is, for example, a photograph depicting a part of the family on August 1, 1937, in a not very happy situation: the head of the family (and there are 10 children!) is dying

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)



Ilya Lensky, director of the Jews in Latvia Museum, speaks about the found rarities

and his relatives are gathered around him. It was the Ritov family, quite well-known at that time in Riga—philanthropists, businessmen, and production equipment engineers. Museum staff sought out and recorded many details of the life of the Ritov family. The collection of Ritov family artifacts that were found hidden in the attic in their old house in Riga is now on display at the museum in the Riga Jewish Community building.

On May 6, Latvia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the "non-diplomatic and anti-Semitic" statements made by representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry against President Egils Levits. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia reported this on its Twitter profile.



On Thursday May 5, during a meeting with Russian Ambassador Mikhail Vanin, representatives of the Latvian Foreign Ministry also stated that the Russian Embassy was engaged in inciting hatred on social networks.

On May 3, the Russian Foreign Ministry published an article "On Anti-Semitism" in which it accused Israel of supporting the "neo-Nazi regime in Kyiv." This article, among other things, mentions that Egils Levits has Jewish roots, but this does not prevent him from "successfully covering up the rehabilitation of the Waffen SS in his country."

Earlier, on May 1, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview with the Italian TV channel Mediaset that "Hitler had Jewish blood" and "the most ardent anti-Semites, as a rule, are Jews themselves." These words were uttered in the context of the allegation that Ukrainian authorities support the Nazis, despite the Jewish origin of President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The Israeli government accused Lavrov of lying and racism. Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar called Lavrov's words "shocking" and suggested that the minister apologize for them.

In mid-May, Odessa, which in those days was one of the targets of intense bombardment by the Russian aggressor, received humanitarian aid from Jewish organizations in Latvia. As Chaim Gershon Vakulenko, the executive director of the receiving organization "Ta zamovleni paykiv," told media correspondents:



An addressee in Odessa, Ukraine opens a humanitarian aid package from Riga

"This is now the third largest cargo that came in from Latvia. There are blankets, clothes, sleeping bags, canned food, and cereals. We will distribute all this to the Jews of Odessa, the elderly, the disabled, and all the needy, not just the Jews. Thank you to the Jewish organizations in Latvia, especially our great friend Anatoly Seev, who collected and organized this shipment in Riga. Numerous local organizations participated in the preparation of this shipment, including the Riga Ghetto Museum, People's Aid Fund, Association Amber Coast Service, Chabad Riga-Latvia, and Sail of Hope. A tremendous thank you to all.

The Riga Ghetto and the Holocaust Museum (located on the corner of Maskavas and Turgeneva streets in Riga) has opened an exhibition of Beitar's rarities—symbols and paraphernalia.



Exhibition of symbols and paraphernalia of the Latvian Beitar in the Riga Ghetto and the Holocaust Museum

This exhibition is truly unique and impressive, and not just for the historians. Curator Yulia Tereshchenko talks about the history of the exhibition. "Six years ago, in the vicinity of Baldone, near Riga, the search group 'Legend' was doing work. Usually, they are looking for dead warriors whose remains need to be reburied. But then, when they finished their work, the metal detector suddenly gave a signal that there was something else in the ground. As a result, at a depth of 70 centimeters, they found

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)

a real treasure—a zinc box. Having opened it, they found a thick layer of dust and under it... flags, badges, tips for flagpoles with Jewish symbols, texts in Hebrew, images of the menorah and much more." It turned out that all these valuable things belonged to the Beitar organization, founded in Riga in 1923 by Zeev Zhabotinsky, an outstanding figure of Zionism and one of the real founding fathers of the State of Israel. Members of the organization hid important symbols, quickly banned in the first months of the Soviet occupation in August 1940.

"Fortunately, we were able to open this exhibition after a two-year wait, everything was delayed due to the pandemic. We left the originals in storage at the museum, as some of them may fall apart due to their age." But the restored nine flags of 'Beitar' are presented, and, in addition, the history of 'Beitar' and Zhabotinsky himself is discussed in detail in the texts and photographs.

This exhibition is the result of a collaboration between the Riga Ghetto Museum and the Zeev Zhabotinsky Institute in Israel. The exhibition is open until the end of September.



Members of the German Riga Committee delegation laying the traditional pebbles at the memorial in Bikernieki

On July 4 and 5, Riga hosted a delegation from the German Riga Committee. This Committee brings together representatives of more than 60 cities in Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic, from which more than 25,000 Jews were deported to Riga in the first years of the war, most of whom were shot here in the Bikernieki forest.



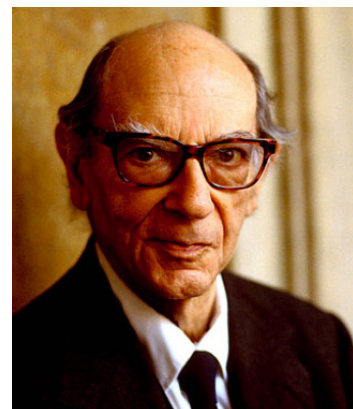
At the exhibition "Final Stop—Riga," located on the Latvian Riflemen Square next to the Occupation Museum

On July 4, the delegation took part in a ceremony at the Gogol Shul memorial and later visited the site of the former Jungfernhof concentration camp. On the morning of July 5, the delegation participated in a memorial service at the Bikernieki memorial. This was the site where most of the deported Jews were killed. After lunch that day, the Jews in Latvia Museum together with the embassies of Germany and Austria opened an

outdoor exhibit "Final Stop—Riga," located on the Latvian Riflemen Square next to the Occupation Museum. This exhibition is dedicated to the fate of European Jews deported to Riga in 1941 and 1942.

German Ambassador to Latvia Christian Heldt, Austrian Ambassador Doris Danler, Deputy Chairman of the Riga City Council Edwards Smiltens, and Director of the Jews in Latvia Museum Ilya Lensky spoke at the opening ceremony of the exhibition.

On June 17, the Day of Isaiah Berlin was celebrated in Riga, the birthplace of the world-famous philosopher who was born on June 6, 1909. In 1921, the Berlin family emigrated to Great Britain, where Berlin studied at Oxford University, graduating with honors. Berlin's entire scholarly career was connected to Oxford University, except for a few years during World War II, when he worked as a British



employee in the U.S. Department of Information and at the British Embassy in Moscow after the war. Berlin was made a Knight Bachelor in 1957 and awarded the British Order of Merit in 1971.

Unfortunately, Berlin did not visit Riga again, although there was an unsuccessful attempt to invite him to his homeland in 1997. Then, only in 2009, realizing the importance for Latvia of the Isaiah Berlin and Riga connection, they began to celebrate Isaiah Berlin Day here annually in the first half of June. In Riga, on the front of House 2A on Albert Street, where Berlin was born, a memorial plaque was installed in honor of the great countryman.

The main event of Isaiah Berlin Day in Riga is always a lecture by a world-famous academic, writer, or an opinion leader. This year, the Isaiah Berlin Association of Latvia invited Yuli Tamir—an Israeli politician and stateswoman, and president and professor of philosophy at Beit Berl College, whose doctoral dissertation at Oxford was once supervised by Sir Isaiah Berlin—to give the lecture. On the same day, the ceremonial renaming of the Reading Room of the National Library of Latvia to the Isaiah Berlin Hall took place.

At the end of last year, deep in the forest in the vicinity of Baldone, a mass grave undiscovered since World War II was found. It was the burial site of the remains of Jews from Baldone and the Baldone district, who were brutally beaten and shot right in a trench left over from World War I. This most likely happened in July 1941, when the Nazi army occupied the territory of Latvia and a local auxiliary police unit was organized in Baldone that committed this terrible crime. The grave was found thanks to a long search by local history enthusiasts, members of the board of the Baldone Museum, Yuri Ershov, and Ojars Andersons. Ershov had been looking for and processing information about the Baldone Jews for many years; the discovery of the grave was the result of his research. The Baldone Museum immediately organized and conducted, together with the international search group "Legend," a months-long examination of the burial site and the exhumation of the remains. Soon, the museum plans to create an exhibition dedicated to the Jews of Baldone.

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)



Exhumation of remains at the site of the execution of the Jews of Baldone

Ojars Andersons, as well as representatives of the international search group “Legend.” In the final part of the ceremony, those in attendance placed a symbolic stone on each coffin. The stones were taken from places near the houses in Baldone where Jewish families once lived.

Anete Braufmane expressed her gratitude to everyone who helped prepare and conduct the ceremony.

On June 30, a funeral ceremony was held for the found remains at the city cemetery. The remains of 39 Baldone residents, including 10 children, were interred. The ceremony was conducted by Eli Krumer, rabbi of the Peytavshul synagogue in Riga. The ceremony was attended by the Chairman of the Kekava Region Duma Yuri Zhilko, Duma Deputy Ineta Romanovska, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia Dmitry Krupnikov, Director of the Jews in Latvia Museum Ilya Lensky, acting head of the Baldone Museum Anete Braufmane, local historians Yuri Ershov and



The final stage of the reburial of remains of the Jews of Baldone

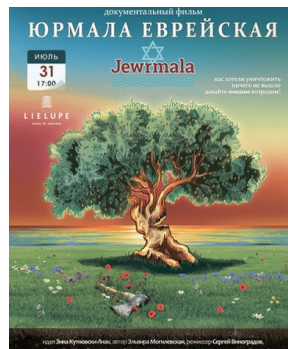
On Thursday, July 21, the 11th Worldwide reunion of Liepāja Jews was opened in Liepāja. On Saturday, July 23, at noon a conference and panel discussion on the topic “Remaining human in inhumane conditions” was held in the conference hall of the Liepāja Jewish congregation.



At the opening of the rally, Liepāja Mayor Gunars Ansins presents an album of the architecture of Liepāja to 90-year-old Mary Boyar, a former Liepāja resident who came from Israel

This gathering was devoted in bright memory to the saviors who risked themselves and their loved ones to save Jewish

lives. Participants in the reunion were also presented with the idea of remembering the Jews of Liepāja who were mercilessly shot with another memorial—in addition to the existing one in Shkede—near the lighthouse, where about 1,200 people were killed. The Israeli Ambassador to Latvia, Sharon Rappaport-Palgi, took part in all the events of the reunion. The Latvian Ambassador to the UN, Andrejs Pildegovičs, made a speech at one of the meetings. The participants at the gathering were also inspired upon hearing a video message from Professor George Schwab, a former Liepāja resident and current vice president of JSL.



On Sunday, July 31, at the hotel in Lielupe the premiere of the documentary *Jewish Jurmala: Jewrmala* took place. The work is dedicated to the Jewish life in this resort town which began in the 19th century. The heyday of Jewish life in Jurmala began in the middle of the 19th century and continued into the beginning of the 20th century. There was a period when, in Dubulti, there was even a street called *Ebreju* (which means Jewish in Latvian). Later, on August 5, 1939, three weeks before the start of WWII, a new synagogue opened in Majori. The building survives to this day, however, is not currently being used for its intended purpose. In September 2018, thanks to the assistance of Emmanuel Grinshpun, Vice President of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress and entrepreneur, the Beit Israel synagogue in Bulduri opened. The work of the synagogue is led by Rabbi and current leader of the Jurmala Jewish community, Shimon Kutnovski-Liak, who is also one of the creators (and, of course, the heroes) of the new film. At times, this synagogue can no longer accommodate everyone who wants to participate in the services, not to mention there is a lack of additional space for full-fledged community activities. Therefore, the film presents the idea of restoring the historical Majori building as a functioning synagogue and Jewish cultural center, complete with a kindergarten, a kosher kitchen, and a space for celebrations.



The building of the pre-war synagogue in Majori, which is planned to be turned into the Jewish center of Jurmala

Before the start of the screening, a presentation was held in the foyer, in which, along with the many Jewish activists, entrepreneurs, and journalists gathered here, the Israeli ambassador to Latvia Sharon Rappaport-Palgi, and the Mayor of Jurmala, Gatis Truksnis, took part.

Compiled by Ivar Brod
Translated by Mariya Taukule